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**Saud Omar e-book Script**

**Charlie**: Last week, I watched a talk in TED by a presenter named Chip Kidd. He said, “Much is to be gained from eBooks: ease, connivance, and portability. But something is defiantly lost: tradition, a sensual experience, and thingy-ness; a little bit of humanity.” Do you think the use of e-books in schools will be fruitful even with losing that bit of humanity?

**Saud**: Allow me to summarize this quote in one word: tangibility. Tangibility is a problematic issue for children because they acquire the habits of reading by imitating. When parents or teachers read books, the children imitate and replicate that behavior. Since e-books are intangible that means the children will not be able to observe that behavior. When parents read on their iPad, smartphones, or laptops they are using multiple-purpose devices that could be use for many things. Even when they use e-readers, those devices are not immediately and clearly distinguishable from tablet-PC’s, at least not for children. The intangibility of e-books extremely reduces the chance for children to acquire the reading habits by imitating.

**Charlie:** Is there any way to take the best of both worlds?

**Saud:** Yes, there is. But it requires a paradigm shift. As teachers and parents we must not think of e-books as only a new medium to deliver the content. Reading from e-book is a new activity that requires additional skills. There are many problems with e-books, intangibility is only one of them, but the majority can be solved when we understand that e-book is something more than a new delivery method.

**Charlie:** Beside the technical skills what are the additional skills that we need to have in order to read e-books?

**Saud:** Focus is an additional skill that needs to be developed. In old days, the kid closes the door of her room, turn off the TV, then she opens the book and focusing comes automatically. Now, with e-book, things are different; distractions come from the reading device itself. Dealing with these inevitable distractions is a skill that young readers need to develop. Another needed new skill is how to select a good e-book. In the past, finding the good book was difficult, but now, all e-books are accessible at any time, which creates a new unprecedented problem: How to select the good one? Abundance and scarcity, in this case, are two sides of the same coin.

**Charlie:** I still can’t see how children can acquire the reading habits when I take into consideration the problem of intangibility. Can you give me a specific example of how can we help the children to acquire the reading habit when we read e-books?

**Saud:** There are many ways to do that, but we can only find them if we stopped thinking first in what exist in printed books before we try to find a parallel in e-books. One of the unparalleled features in e-books is the easy process of creating e-book. It is hard, very hard, to publish a printed book, but, on the other hand, anyone could publish an e-book in minutes. Now imagine a child publishing her own e-book and distributing it to her class or family. Undoubtedly, that will create a profound and creative relationship between her and the e-books.

**Charlie:** You are very enthusiastic about e-books, but are there things that we need to worry about? Are e-books completely safe?

**Saud:** Let me first tell you a story that happened to me, and million of other computers users around the world, this year.Few months ago, I came back home at night and opened my Google Reader to read the news. Google reader is an essential part of my life. I use it every night to read the news and my favorite blogs. To my surprise, I found out that night that Google is planning to shut down Google Reader very soon, although it is a very successful product. For me, it was a disaster until I learned later how I could export all the links of my sites and blogs and import them in different RSS reader. Now imagine the same thing happening to my Kindle, my beloved e-reader. What if Amazon suddenly decided to abandon the business of e-readers and e-books? In that case I will lose all my e-books forever in a second. It will not be possible for me to use new e-reader to read my old e-books because Amazon’s e-books work only with Kindle. The e-books are not entirely safe because readers pay for e-books but they do not completely own them.

**Charlie:** How could e-books and e-reader be improved?

**Saud:** There are many areas for improvements. First, there must be a universal format for e-books. In schools, students bring different e-readers, and each e-reader is from different company, and each company sells e-books in different format. That causes infinite confusion and incompatibility in class. When students pay for an e-book they should be able to have them in any format they want.

Second, e-reader must be enhanced with colors. The screen of all e-readers is in black and white. Tablet-PC screen, on the other hand, has colors, but reading, especially for a long time, with a tablet-PC is like running for a long distance with a pair of sandals.

Third, users should be able to install apps on e-reader. Think of how apps could improve the reading experience. For instance, apps can count the minutes, the pages, or the books and gives summary of reading progress and badges of achievement.

Fourth, e-reader should allow creating multiple accounts for different users at the same time. That will be useful in class when different students use the same reading device. This will not hurt the business of the e-reader because companies make profits mainly by selling e-books, not the e-readers. That is why e-reader is inexpensive.

Fifth, every e-book should have a forum dedicated and linked to it where readers can gather and talk about the book. It will also be valuable if there was a form attached to the e-book where it is possible for the readers to send questions directly to the author.

Sixth, and this is the most important, when a new edition of an e-book comes out, the publisher should be able to send the updates to the e-books for those who bought the old edition.